

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 MC-02 ACDA-07

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0000

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 4343

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ESTC, VE

SUBJ: FLAMETHROWERS FOR VENEZUELA

REF: STATE 083502

SUMMARY. THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY NOT ONLY HAVE ALREADY TAKEN DELIVERY OF 30 U.S. FLAMETHROWERS PROVIDED UNDER AN FMS PURCHASE APPROVED IN 1974, BUT ALSO HAVE RECEIVED MOST OF THE SPARE PARTS ASSOCIATED WITH A SECOND VENEZUELAN REQUEST FOR PURCHASE OF U.S. FLAMETHROWERS. SINCE OUR FAILURE TO APPROVE THE SECOND SALE WOULD BE MISINTERPRETED AS DIRECT RETALIATION AGAINST THE GOV FOR ACTIONS WHOLLY UNRELATED TO OUR MILITARY RELATIONS WITH VENEZUELA, WITH A CONSEQUENT SERIOUSLY ADVERSE EFFECT UPON THEM, AS WELL AS ON OUR OVERALL RELATIONS, WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND A ONE-TIME EXCEPTION BE MADE TO PERMIT THIS SECOND SALE TO BE COMPLETED. END SUMMARY.

1. IN 1975 THE VENEZUELAN ARMY MADE AN FMS PURCHASE OF 30 M 9A1-7 TYPE FLAMETHROWERS PLUS SPARE PARTS FOR \$49,978.12. THIS PURCHASE, KNOWN AS FMS CASE 72X, WAS APPROVED IN WASHINGTON ON JULY 22, 1974. THE 30 FLAMETHROWERS WERE DELIVERED DURING CALENDAR YEAR 1975 AND HAVE BEEN ISSUED TO THE AVENDANA COMBAT ENGINEER BATTALION STATIONED IN CARACAS. THE FIRST TIME ONE OF THESE WEAPONS WAS USED WAS IN DEMONSTRATION AT THE VENEZUELAN  
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ARMY INFANTRY SCHOOL IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR. SINCE THE AVENDANA

BATTALION IS ASSIGNED TO ARMY SUPPORT TROOPS, WITH A COMBAT SUPPORT ROLE, IT CANNOT BE ASSUMED THAT THE FLAMETHROWERS WOULD BE USED IN ANY FIRST LINE OFFENSIVE ROLE.

2. IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT THE VENEZUELAN MARINE CORPS FOR SOME YEARS HAS BEEN EQUIPPED WITH FLAMETHROWERS OF U.S. MANUFACTURE, BUT OF AN OLDER MODEL. WE KNOW OF NO PLANS FOR THE VENEZUELAN MARINE CORPS TO PROCURE MORE OF THIS TYPE OF WEAPON.

3. WE PRESUME THAT REFTTEL REFERS TO THE SUBSEQUENT FMS CASE 7XZ, WHICH INVOLVED AN ADDITIONAL 30 M 9A1-7 TYPE FLAMETHROWERS. OUR RECORDS INDICATE THIS SECOND PURCHASE WAS APPROVED IN WASHINGTON ON NOVEMBER 22, 1974. WHILE THESE FLAMETHROWERS HAVE NOT BEEN DELIVERED, OVER 90 PERCENT OF THEIR ASSOCIATED SPARE PARTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN RECEIVED BY THE VENEZUELAN ARMY.

4. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, OUR FAILURE TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THE SECOND VENEZUELAN ORDER FOR FLAMETHROWERS WOULD BE CERTAIN TO PRODUCE A SERIOUS ADVERSE REACTION HERE. THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT THE DEPARTMENT'S 1983 APPROVAL OF THE SECOND SALE OF FLAMETHROWERS WAS "INADVERTENT," SINCE IT FOLLOWED SO SHORTLY AFTER THE APPROVAL OF AN IDENTICAL SALE, AND SINCE SO MUCH TIME HAS PASSED SINCE WE DISCOVERED OUR ERROR. THE GOV WILL DOUBTLESS REGARD OUR REFUSAL TO COMPLETE DELIVERY OF THE SECOND PURCHASE AS DIRECT RETALIATION FOR THE RECENT DECISION TO NATIONALIZE OWENS-ILLINOIS DE VENEZUELA, THUS INTENSIFYING THE UNFORTUNATE EFFECTS OF THAT CASE ON U.S.-VENEZUELAN RELATIONS.

5. IN ADDITION, WE WOULD CONSIDER IT PARTICULARLY UNFORTUNATE IF THE DEPARTMENT WOULD HAVE TO REVERSE AT THIS JUNCTURE ITS EARLIER APPROVAL OF THIS SALE. THE LOSS OF FMS CREDIT TO VENEZUELA AND THE POSSIBLY LOSS OF THE MAP TRAINING PROGRAM ARE ALREADY STRAINING OUR IMPORTANT AND TRADITIONALLY CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONS WITH THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY. SHOULD WE NOW REVERSE OUR DECISIONS ON THE FLAMETHROWERS THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY ARE BOUND TO REGARD THE ACTION AS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF U.S. DISINTEREST IN CONTINUING WITH THEM THE GOOD RELATIONS WE HAVE ENJOYED IN THE PAST. IT IS FAR FROM

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INCONCEIVABLE THAT LOCAL PUBLICITY WOULD BE GENERATED IN THE EVENT OF OUR REFUSAL, FURTHER AGGRAVATING U.S.- VENEZUELAN REALTIONS.

6. BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTY OF EXPLAINING TO THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY A REVERSAL OF THIS SALE, AND IN THE INTEREST OF OUR OVERALL RELATIONS WITH VENEZUELA, WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THE DEPARTMENT NOT TAKE THE STEPS PROPOSED IN PAR 3 OF THE REFTTEL, BUT REVIEW THE SITUATION WITH A VIEW TO MAKING A QUIET ONE-TIME

EXCEPTION. WE COULD THEN TELL THE VENEZUELANS THAT, BECAUSE OUR  
POLICY PRECLUDES THE EXPORT OF FLAMETHROWERS TO LATIN AMERICA,  
WE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SELL VENEZUELA ANY MORE SUCH WEAPONS IN THE  
FUTURE.

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